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THE IDEOLOGY OF BUILDING:
THE INTERPRETATION OF COMPOUND PATTERNS AMONG THE KAP-
SIKI OF NORTH CAMEROON

1. INTRODUCTION

While his whole demeanor expresses his justifiable pride, Vandu Tsehe leads us into his large compound, eager to show off the many huts and numerous people of his *rhè* (house). Guiding us through the *derha*, the open, overroofed entrance where guests and visitors are usually received, he enters the house proper through the *yindlu*, the man-high stone wall that shields the huts from the rest of the world. The sides of this wall rise two feet above the rest of the walls and are covered with the remains of old sacrifices and offerings, testifying how important it is to protect the house against the dangers lurking beyond the wall. In order to arrive at the inner compound we walk through the *dabala*, the entrance hut with its characteristic two doors or apertures. As Deli Nkara, Vandu's father, is home, we are introduced to him. Usually visitors ignore Deli, who as an octogenarian is too old to count in Kapsiki society (Fig. 1), though the house is considered to be his.

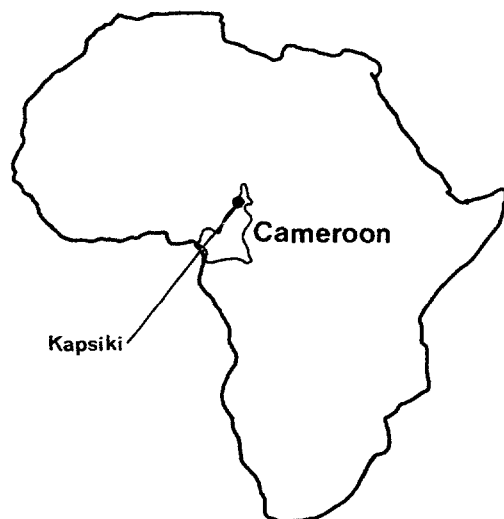
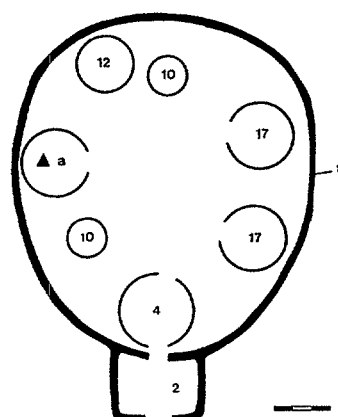


Fig. 1. Location of the Kapsiki.

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The big compound, cramped with dwellings, gives the impression of housing a legion of people (Fig. 2). In fact Vandu and his four wives and (in all) seven children live here, together with Vandu's father, Deli and his wife (not Vandu's mother) Kwasa. Thus Vandu is a rich man, *gelepi*, meaning someone rich in people. He is proud of it, a successful Kapsiki, who is well respected in the village of Mogodé. People listen to him as he speaks about village business: they sometimes even heed his advice. He is a hard worker as well, who has his granaries filled with sorghum. His four wives form the bulk of his labour force together with the older children. Actually, Vandu is a successful Kapsiki, just because he manages that many wives to stay in his house. His compound reflects that success¹.

The difference between the two compounds is interpreted by the Kapsiki primarily as the result of the relative success of the owner in social engineering: having wives stay in the house and begetting surviving children. Of primary importance are women. Kapsiki women are known to have a high degree of marital mobility (Van Beek, 1978), and habitually move from one husband to another in their search for food, children, protection and companionship (more or less in that order). Their first marriage as a



▲a

Fig. 3. Compound of Madu (age 68).

girl, *makwa*, has bonded them to a husband of the village of their birth, after which subsequent marriages lead them to other villages, as no two consecutive husbands should belong to the same village (Van Beek, in press). A modal wife marries between three and five husbands in her life, whereas a modal man, given the preference for polygyny, has between seven and ten wives in his married life.

In our real life examples, Vandu has married 13 wives, four of whom are staying in his house at this moment (Fig. 4). Madu, his neighbour has married five (Fig. 5), but none has stayed. Of Vandu's four wives, one married him as a girl, but has strayed away several times to other husbands, each time returning to her first one. The same holds for his second wife, Masi Deli. His other two wives are *kwatewume*, run away women coming from another husband and village, Sukur and Sena respectively; Vandu is their third respectively fourth husband. Madu, in the 50 years of his married life, has wed five women. One died in childbirth in Madu's house after two years of marriage, one stayed forty years with Madu with short breaks, and recently left him after a brawl, in order to live with her one and only son, two *kwatewume* were brought back to their first husband by their parents and the fifth one, according to Madu, ran away without any reason. Consequently the two women's huts in Madu's compound are empty, and in fact one granary is empty too.

So much for those two men. For themselves, the differences are huge, unsurmountable. Outsiders, such as we are, perceive the underlying constants rooted in Kapsiki culture.

2. MOUNTAIN REFUGES: GENERAL ASPECTS OF KAPSIKI LIFE²

The Kapsiki, called Higi in Nigeria, straddle the frontier between Nigeria and

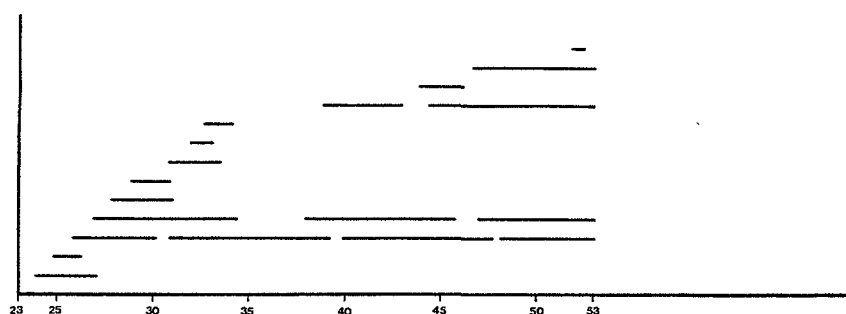


Fig. 4. Marital history of Vandu (age 53).

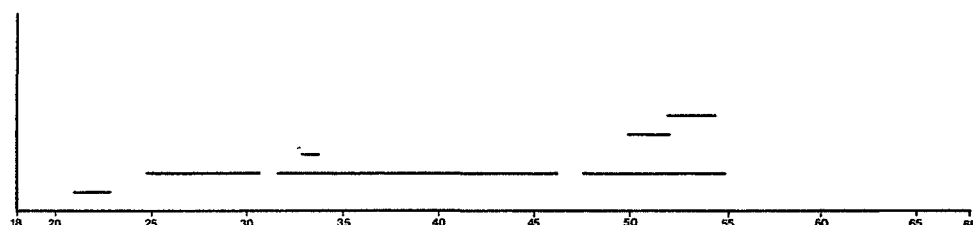


Fig. 5. Marital history of Madu (age 68).

Cameroon (Fig. 1), about 300 km south of Lake Chad. Numbering 600.000 in Cameroon and some 100.000 in Nigeria they form one of the numerous medium-sized groups inhabiting the Mandara Mountains. The Kapsiki live on and around a plateau in the heart of those mountains, dotted with outcroppings, rests of old volcanoes, which give the landscape its peculiar character. As a predominantly horticultural society they cultivate sorghum, millet, maize and various small crops. Animal husbandry is fairly important, with goats and sheep forming the majority of livestock, supplemented by a considerable number of cattle.

Kapsiki life before the French and German colonization was characterized by continuous internal warfare (Van Beek, in press). In Hobbesian terms life must often have been brutish (sometimes short) though not always nasty, as warfare has, at least for the winners, its own rewards. Each village was at war with nearly all its neighbours, and within the villages fighting occurred, though on a more limited scale and with a de-escalating weaponry (Otterbein, 1968; Van Beek, 1978). Any village could try to catch slaves which could either be ransomed back or sold on the 'international market' of Bornu or Sokoto (Nigeria). The result was a fragmented society, without a paramount ruler, even almost without any supravillage authority or intervillage contact (for men). Women roamed freely between the warring villages, going from one man to another; each next husband just had to be aware of her former ties in order to decide whether he could marry her or not. These same women, who carefully kept a village distance between their consecutive husbands, were often the reason for war between those very villages (Van Beek, in press), and actually seemed to have been proud of the fact.

That same war and the mobility of the women were related to the huge infant mortality among the Kapsiki. To this very day Kapsiki society is stationary, due to a typical pre-transition kind of demography: high fertility and high mortality. Children die from the many endemic diseases like malaria, intestinal infections, tetanus, measles and the periodic epidemics of meningitis that sweep the mountain area. This high infant mortality (66% before the age of 5: Podlewski, 1966) is an important factor inducing women to leave their husband and village as no mother will stay in the village where her child has died. However, the very mobility of women is not conducive to child survival. Women leave for many other reasons as well: jealousy, bad treatment by the husband, complaints about being the only or the umpteenth wife, the presence or absence of a mother-in-law in the house and so on. When they leave, they have to leave their child at their husband's home, if it is weaned, or return it to their husband after weaning. There are instances where the children are left behind even before weaning. In any case, the influence of this mobility on the younger children can be disastrous; instances have been observed where the children actually pine away after their mother has left (Van Beek, 1981; Richard, 1977). So mortality and the mobility of women mutually reinforce each other. Through the combined factors of war, the mobility of women and high infant mortality, the population of the Kapsiki area is stationary.

The external threat of slave raiding was a third factor determining the former Kapsiki way of life. The Mandara Mountains have been a slave raiding reserve for the surrounding muslim emirates since time immemorial: the Emirs of Bornu, Baghuirmi, Mandara and of the Adamawa Fulani are known to have scourged the area periodically in search for slaves. Though the amount of slaves captured and sold from the Kapsiki villages is difficult to assess, it must have meant a serious threat to the local populations. Tales about the yearly tribute paid in slaves by some other 'Kirdi' (non-islamized) groups (Barth, 1857), the impressions of the slave markets in Mora (just North of the mountains), Maiduguri and Yola (Nigeria) (Kirk-Greene, 1958) convey the impression of considerable numbers of mountain people sold in slavery. Thus, defence against surprise attack ranged among the very first priorities. In narrow valleys people built earth ramparts against the mounted cavalry of the slave raiders, and where possible villages were built on inaccessible hilltops, like the volcanic outcroppings dotting the Kapsiki plateau. Pleasing the eyes of today's tourists, these rocky abodes have been the refuge of the Kapsiki up until colonial times. The last defense for the Kapsiki was the high stone wall circling his mansion, the *yindlu* we encountered in our opening case.

The colonizer, abolishing slavery and slave raiding, changed this latter aspect of Kapsiki life. After the pacification of the area, which actually took quite a long time (well into this century), the Kapsiki started moving out into the surrounding undulating plains of the Kapsiki plateau and Nigerian lowlands, building their homes farther from the village nucleus, closer to their fields. This tendency was tempered by the persistence of intervillage hostilities till after the Second World War. After the fifties the rate of dispersal grew. Mogodé e.g., grew from four wards (clusters of compounds that form a subdivision of the village) to 14 after 1950.

This dispersal of settlements weakened the control of the clans and lineages over the individual Kapsiki, a control which had been tenuous anyway. A further individualization set in, which nowadays is very characteristic of Kapsiki society. Where the stone walls served military purposes in the past, today they aim more at preserving privacy, keeping the villagers out instead of the enemy. This tendency towards privacy, quite uncommon on the African scene, is in itself not new, but it has been stimulated by the colonial and postcolonial safety of the area. The government's insistence that their subjects build their homes in accessible places near roads (easy for tax collection and other mechanisms of state control) is interesting only for those who wish to pursue new economic opportunities, like commerce.

Thus, the settlements of the Kapsiki reflected their general situation. Huddled on the inaccessible hilltops, crammed on the outcroppings of the plateau or tucked away in the nooks and crannies of the rugged hillside, they had been first and foremost defensive bullwarks against an enemy with superior weaponry. With the colonial pacification, people moving out, settling closer to their lands, the layout of the village changed considerably, even if the compounds as such remained more or less similar. In order to understand this settlement pattern, however, we have to view the way the Kapsiki organize their society and the values they attach to their house and its ramifications in the community at large.

3. LIVING IN GROUPS: NEIGHBOURS AND KINSMEN

The basic structure of Kapsiki social life is quite standard, as they form a patrilineal, virilocal village society. The choice of a building site, as well as the shape and size of the *rhè* are influenced by the Kapsiki patterns of clan cohesion and fissioning, by the relations between close agnates and by their view and ideology of what constitutes an ideal family and an ideal man.

The main fabric of social life is formed by the patrilineal system, in which each village has its own set of patrilineal clans. As another village has different clans, patrilineal kinship is hemmed in by the village borders. In order to facilitate relations with other villages, however, a system of adoption of 'foreigners' (people from other villages) exists, through which people easily enter the local social structure. Clans are divided into lineages (Van Beek, 1978). Both bear the names of the founding ancestors, and contain a modal number of 60 and 20 households respectively. For everyday purposes a smaller agnatic group functions, which is not named, but consists of the descendants of a FaFaFaFa, with a modal number of 7 households. It is this group which is relevant for the choice of a building site. Kapsiki do not build next to their closest kin. A new *rhè* is built next to a FaFaBrSo, a FaBr or a FaFaFaBrSoSo; they select someone who is likeable within the smallest agnatic group but who does not live too close to Fa or Br. In this fashion the clans and lineages tend to be dispersed over all the wards of the village. Individually men live close to agnates who are their main support, but who do not have the amount of control and jurisdiction over them their father has.

The same reluctance to live too close to one's family shows in the composition of the household. Married sons linger for a while in the compound, but leave their father's compound before they marry their second wife. The youngest son may stay with his father, but then the father is too old to count as the family head. Vandu's household offers an illustration of this situation. Women come and go in the house, arriving in marriage and leaving either for new husbands, or to settle with one of their sons in their old age.

Marriage residency is strictly virilocal, the girl leaving her kinsmen on her first marriage, or her husband and her village on her secondary marriages. Polygyny, a general feature of the Kapsiki marriage system as 12% of all men has more than one wife, implies joint residence of the co-wives. All wives live in the same compound, each having her own hut, often with her own kitchen, though they may share a grinding hut. A man marries women from different clans and villages, selecting his spouses also for their origin. Marriage of related women, especially members of the same clan, is frowned upon for various reasons. One is the specific rights and duties attached to bride-price payments for each wife, another the relation with in-laws with its many sensitivities and behavioral proscriptions. The main reference point for the choice of wives, however, is their former husband. He should not be someone with a close relationship to the new husband, in short he must be a potential enemy.

Kapsiki society is characterized throughout by an insistence on privacy and individual autonomy, which is surprising in an African context. The architecture of the compound reflects this: built as a castle it is a self-contained unit aiming at autarchy. A Kapsiki man should guard his own privacy against any intrusion from outside. There is, characteristically, hardly a word for 'welcome' in Kapsiki. People coming in the compound freely enter the *derha*, but will never enter the main wall without being explicitly invited. Mostly they are not; signalling their presence (*mbeli ki rhè?*, anybody home?) they wait for the Lord of the Mansion to appear. Almost all interaction with neighbours and kinsmen finds place in the *derha*, though in the wet season the *dabala*, entrance hut, may serve this purpose.

In order to preserve his privacy, a Kapsiki should be independent of his kinsmen, manage his own affairs and consequently mind his own business. Intrusions from outsiders, persons or agencies, are resented, be it kinsmen, neighbours or authorities. Kapsiki resent any authority placed over them. In their own political system the village chief has only a nominal, mainly religious function, without any direct control of his fellow villagers and without any judicial authority whatsoever. Kapsiki are considered troublemakers by the civil authorities, people who never agree on anything and are hard to coerce into any kind of official or collective endeavour.

In religion, too, people hardly depend on one another, as the most important ritual unit by far is the family living in one compound. Any man can and will perform the necessary rituals without interference from his agnates. Characteristically, the only people allowed inside a compound when a sacrifice is being performed, apart from the family in question, are the blacksmiths, if invited. Blacksmiths form a separate substratum in Kapsiki society, performing as a socio-professional class most functions calling for some specialization in the Kapsiki economic system: they forge iron, cast

brass, make music at most social functions, perform all burials, are the best diviners and medicinemen, and on invitation perform sacrifices; their women make pottery and have their own medicinal specializations. As a group they are characterized by a strict endogamy (actually no non-smith Kapsiki will dream of marrying a smith man or woman), a different set of food taboos (in fact most taboos for non-smiths do not apply to blacksmiths: Van Beek, 1982b) and throughout a lower status in society. Blacksmiths are considered non-persons in the village, which facilitates the use of their services. The separation between blacksmith and 'normal' Kapsiki is so sharp, that the work of a blacksmith in no way detracts from the autonomy of the individual Kapsiki. Their caste-like status precludes them from being either competitors for or authorities over the Kapsiki.

Thus, the general picture is that of a familial unit which strives for autonomy and keeps its inevitable ties spread out over the other units of the village, so that no one can gain ascendancy over one's own unit. Relations with neighbours are good because frictions are avoided, interacting never becoming too intense. A careful management of social relations is needed to guarantee this privacy (Van Beek, 1982a).

4. THE STRUCTURE OF THE COMPOUND

The general outline of a Kapsiki house is fairly structured, deriving from a system of clearcut oppositions (Fig. 6). The most important ones are: in-group/out-group; male/female; old/young.

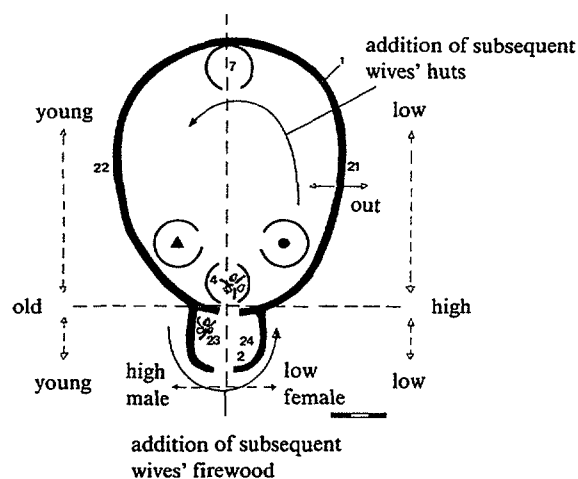


Fig. 6. Schematic representation of a Kapsiki compound.

The circle of the *yindlu* (wall) constitutes the dividing line between in-group and out-group, the most important of all distinctions in Kapsiki life (Pl. I). The vertical axis divides the male ('the belly of the house') from the female side ('the bottom of the house'). This axis should roughly correspond with a north-south direction, the opening in the wall being either north or south; the most important thing is that the

rays of the rising or setting sun should not enter the opening in the wall. Finally an old-young gradient is discernible from the opening in the wall to the back of the house: the father and first wife live closest to the entrance, on opposite sides of it, the younger wives and the mature sons are at the back of the compound, though the younger wife's huts may be built closer to the one of the husband when the female side is filled up.

The forecourt, *derha*, has a similar structure. Which side of it, left or right, actually will be male or female, and whether the entrance will be directed towards the north or the south depends on the condition of the site, viz. its relief. The male side should be built on the higher ground, the female on the lower. There is a tendency to choose the site in such a way that the male side will be to the left of the entrance. Inside the wall, in the house proper, the oldest people live higher than the younger ones, so the entrance in the wall is near the highest point. In fact, this entrance in the wall is the fixed point of the house, its *axis mundi*. In building the house the position of this entrance is determined and established first, and then the layout of the compound is completed. Later additions and revisions will never change the position of this entrance. The compound will be enlarged in both directions, but the axis (indicated old-high on Fig. 6) will remain unchanged.

The actual *derha* consists of a low wall, two feet high, on which the firewood of the respective wives of the compound is stacked. Starting with the wood of the first wife against the wall on the high, male side, and following the order of marriage each subsequent wife's firewood is stacked, circulating the *derha* up to the other link with the main wall. The reason the Kapsiki offer for this arrangement is, that it is not right that a newly arrived wife, when loading her new firewood on top of her pile, should be able to look over the wall and see the hut of her husband. For the trusted older wife that is less problematic. The *derha* is covered by the *gelinka*, an open overroofing resting on poles dug into the ground inside the *derha*, covered with wooden beams, straw mats and usually with a large amount of straw. The straw of the family is stored here. Sometimes this place in the sun is used to dry produce.

The relation between the public part of the house, the *derha*, and the private one inside the *yindlu*, bears some dialectic features. The opposition between private and public, accentuated by the *yindlu*, is mediated by the *derha*, which is a special place where in- and out-group can meet. A dividing line, the actual watershed of the site and the permanent axis of the dwelling, separates both parts. The *derha* appears to be a transformation of the main house: it has male/female opposition and a high/low situation associated with male/female as well as old/young. So much is similar. The places of the women and the fire, however, are opposite. Inside the compound proper, the first wife is on the opposite side of the man and consecutive wives move downwards and around, the hut of the youngest one ending up near the husband; in the *derha* the firewood of the first wife is on the male side, and the youngest one ends up at the highest point of the female side. The fireplace is on the male side in the *derha* and on the female side in the *dabala*. So the *derha* and the main house are each other's mirror images, with its concomitant permutations due to the mediating function of the *derha*.

5. ELEMENTS OF BUILDING

Inside the house the line from the entrance, through the *dabala*, the eventual *dabala kehu* (joint grinding kitchen of the wives) to the *duwe* (brewery) separates the male and the female side. Often this line is accentuated by a footpath, lined with stones. Thus, the *dabala* and the *duwe* mediate between male and female aspects of the house; both are closely associated with cooking. The *dabala* is the hut where the family meets and eats in the wet season, men and women apart. The *dabala kehu* is the place to grind the millet for food preparation, a female task, whereas the *duwe* is the scene for brewing millet beer, in principle a male undertaking (as far as it concerns red beer; the white variety, brewed by women is not usually made in the *duwe*). The latter is a large building, in principle situated in the wall, characterized by a loose construction, especially the thatched roof. It often has no door.

On the male side several kinds of buildings can be found: huts, granaries and stables. All personal huts are more or less equal in size and construction: a round stone/mud wall, man-high with a thatched roof. The man of the house and one of his adult sons have such a hut on the male side, the women each have one on their side. Stables differ in size and shape. The one for cattle is a simple wall, about one meter in height, surrounding the area for the cattle. The same holds for a donkey stable. Goat and sheep stables are different, and consist of what the Kapsiki call a *citlè*, a low stone walled hut, 1.50 m in diameter, with a flat roof of wood and mud. This kind of structure can either be used as a stable or as a storage room. A man's sacrificial paraphernalia often are stored in it. On top of this *citlè*, granaries are built, which come in two types (Fig. 7). There is a male one, called *tame*, and a female one, *dèdimu*. Both are cone-shaped. The *tame* is plaited from various kinds of grasses, the *dèdimu* has the same shape but is made of mud, and covered with a number of straw mats to protect it against the rain. The female type is sometimes used by the man, and then is called *mbehtembu*. A third kind of granary, *gure*, made of mud, is strictly reserved for women, and has an inside partitioning (Fig. 7). Several small crops are stored in here.

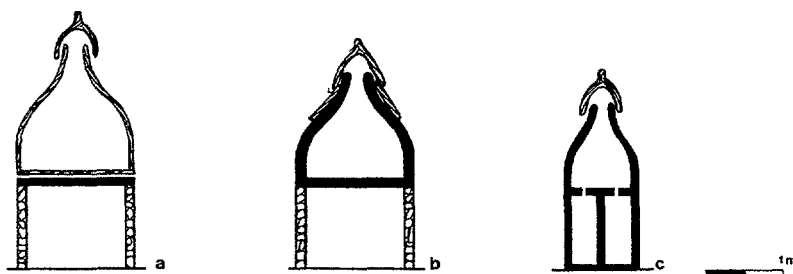


Fig. 7. Granary types.

The female side of the compound harbours the same elements: huts, granaries as well as kitchens. Kitchen and hut of one wife may be built as one unit with only one door for both, in which case they are called *dapa* and *vi* respectively. Most often they are built separately and are called 'woman's hut' and 'food hut'. Behind the hut of each wife is a

mewehi, a place where she washes herself, with a *lèwa*, a small opening at the foot of the wall to let the water out. In the female section the space between the huts may be overroofed with wooden beams and straw mats. On some places, often connected with the *dabala* or the man's hut, a special protection against rain and sunshine is formed by the so-called *medzeketlewe*, a round thatched roof set up as a lean-to against the hut. All the above elements are shown in figure 8 (see also Pl. 2).

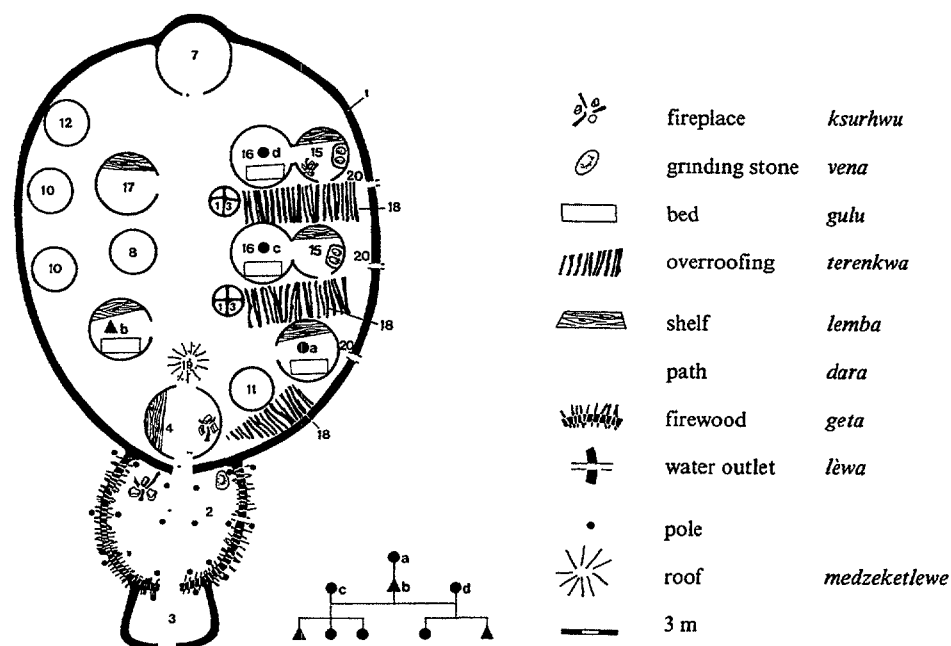


Fig. 8. A Kapsiki compound in some detail: the *rhè* of Lèwa (age 57).

6. THE LIFE CYCLE OF A COMPOUND

A compound such as the one depicted above, is the result of a long, complicated and variegated history, and cannot be understood without a clear understanding of its life cycle. In order to follow the typical compound through its various stages of growth and decline, we start with a Kapsiki son, who has married his first wife and is living with his father. He selects a patrilineal relative (a classificatory father) probably in another ward of the village. He then asks the *mblama*, the ward chief, for a site to build on, close to his kinsman. This permission is granted and a site is given. The owner of the ground is compensated with a small present, and the building gets under way with the help of some age mates (men initiated in the same year) and his kinsmen. If necessary a labour party is organized, but in this phase of his life the young man does not yet command a large following and has to build mostly by himself. He usually starts with his *dabala*, then his personal hut and the wall. The *derha* may be built by

communal labour. Then a granary is built, and finally the woman's hut, though the order may be changed. This first phase results in a small compound, where the huts are strewn rather loosely within the surrounding wall (Fig. 9).

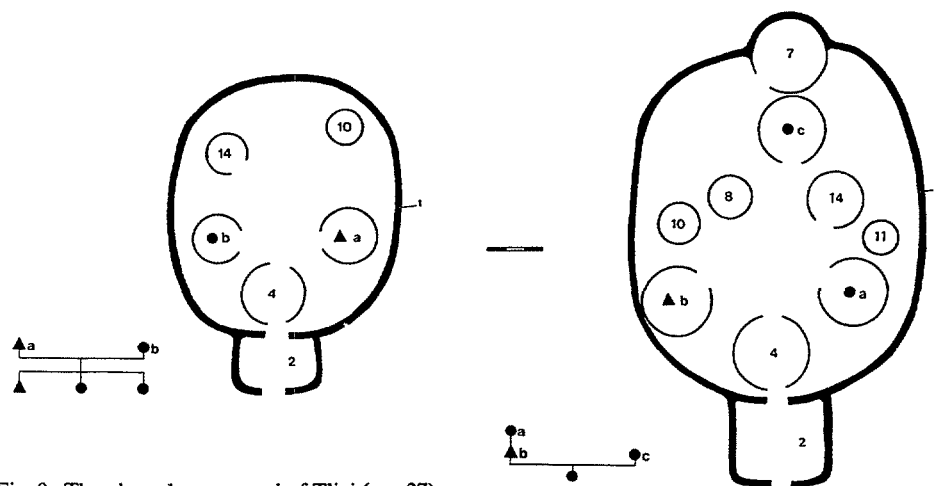


Fig. 9. The phase 1 compound of Tliyi (age 27).

Fig. 10. The phase 2 compound of Keka (age 28).

If the young man keeps working and his wife does not run away too soon, or if he manages to marry a new wife quickly, then usually his mother comes to live with him. His granaries are multiplied, a small stable is added to the buildings, and the hut for his mother is built, though the hut of a former wife may serve too. A *duwe*, brewery, is built into the wall. Then phase 2 is reached, which in fact is the phase of a well established, monogamous family with a coresident mother (Fig. 10).

As women come and go through the house, children stay behind. The young man is now in his thirties, and after his initial *makwa* bride, marries in rather quick succession some *kwatewume*, brides 'stolen' from other villages. These women, however, leave his compound as quickly as they enter it. His *makwa* has left him, but the children stay behind. His compound has grown a little (phase 3), and one of his former wives' huts is now empty, a so-called *cè kwafawe*, 'a hut that does not listen'. In this example a second *dabala* serves as a brewery (Fig. 11).

Then, at the end of his thirties the great divide sets in, between those men who succeed in building a larger compound, filled with people, with fertile women whose offspring does not die on the one hand, and, on the other hand, those that see their wives leave without having born children. We follow a successful example, and the *rhè* is dramatically expanded. The number of women increases, and each wife gets her own kitchen. The children are older now, and the elder sons marry, bringing their wives into the compound. The expanded labour force as well as the increase in consumption implies a great number of granaries, built by the husband for his wives and himself. His *derha* is expanded as his social function is increased. He is one of the *za* now, the real men, and people gather in his forecourt to drink the beer of his sacrifices and hear the

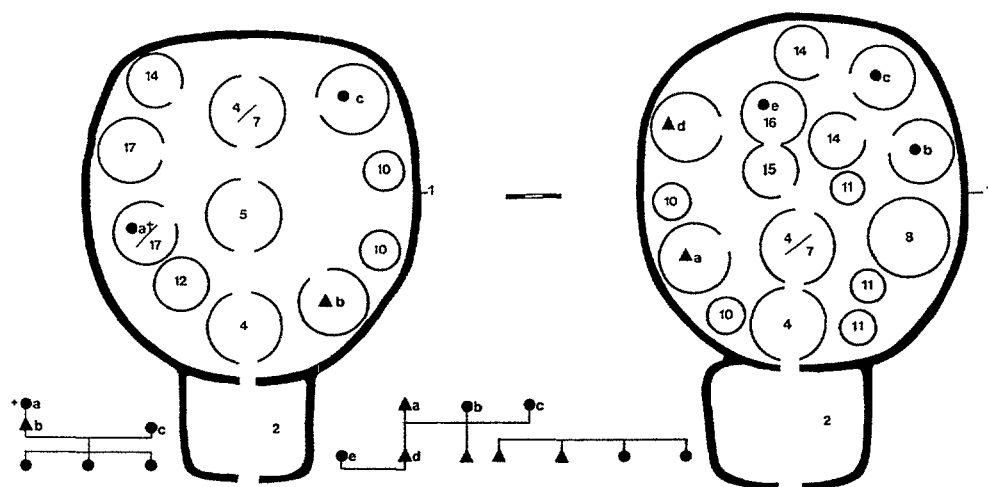


Fig. 11. The phase 3 compound of Tizhe Meha (age 34).
Fig. 12. The phase 4 compound of Kwatebe (age 45).

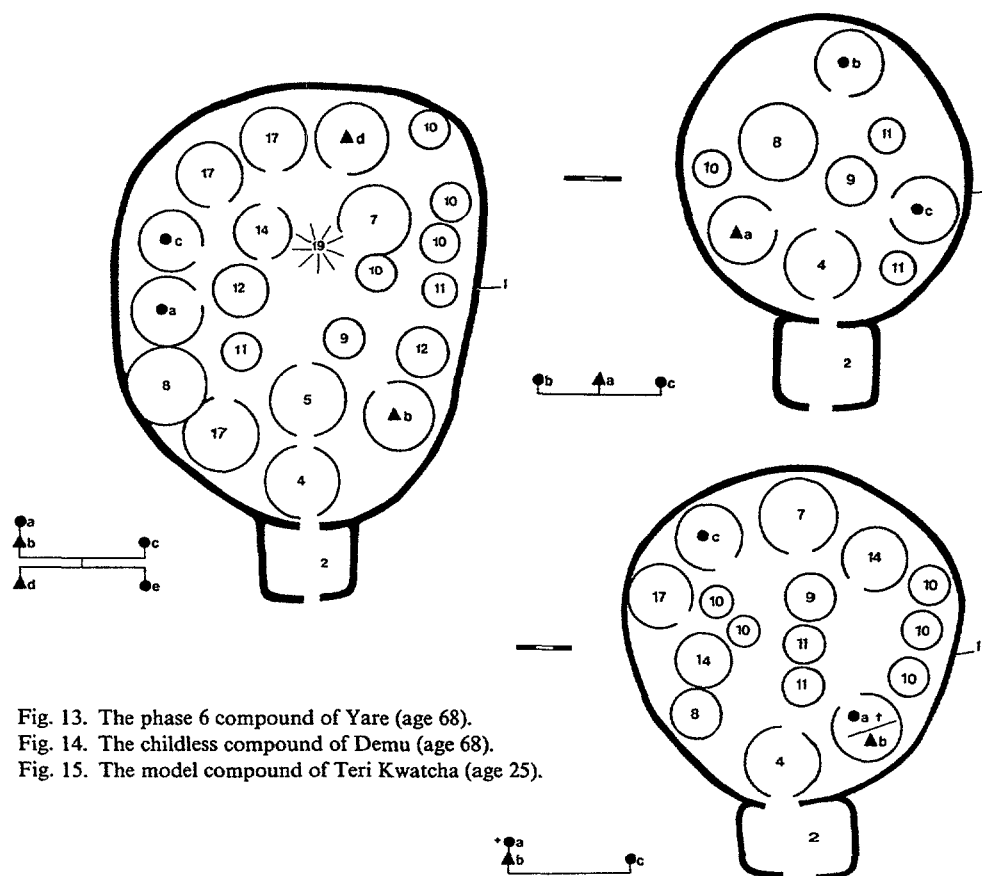


Fig. 13. The phase 6 compound of Yare (age 68).
Fig. 14. The childless compound of Demu (age 68).
Fig. 15. The model compound of Teri Kwatcha (age 25).

speeches made by the old men. This is phase 4 of the compound (Fig. 12).

Finally, still following a successful man, the number of wives can increase even further (phase 5). The largest compound of Mogodé housed a man and ten wives, with a total of 25 children at the time of our research. So, our opening example of Deli Nkara is not exceptional (though still considered a big *rhè*) and can serve as an example here (Fig. 2). Added are a number of personal huts, kitchens, granaries and stables; the wall is enlarged and so is the *derha*. This type of house usually implies a longstanding concern of the inhabitants for their built environment, which shows in the neat arrangement of the *yindlu*, in the paths meticulously lined with stones, and in the numerous overroofings to shield against sun and rain and to store crops. In this phase the husband will be in his fifties, someone who is at the peak of his social strength and importance. He marries nearly each year, *makwa* as well as *kwatewume*, though his younger brides do leave him rather quickly, preferring a younger husband. He may inherit some widows from his deceased brothers. His granaries are filled, even with the harvest of one or two years ago, and he now commands a sizeable herd of cattle, in addition to a large number of sheep and goats.

When our man grows older, his women leave him quicker than he can remarry, and his house is gradually emptied. His sons leave him when they reach the age at which they want to marry their second wife. So, reaching the end of his sixties, our man stays alone in his compound, desperately trying to fill his house, fighting an uphill battle. Though his compound is still filled with huts, granaries and stables, most are empty. If he has been successful, i.e. has surviving sons, his youngest son stays behind, and (also if he is successful) one wife. This is our phase 6 compound (Fig. 13; Pl. 3). Eventually our man dies in the house which by now counts his son as main inhabitant, the *maze rhè*.

So far we have followed the line of success, but other options are relevant as well. Madu, the neighbour in our opening case, is an example of the opposite: a social loser stuck in a phase 1 or 2 house. His women left him without leaving children behind. Another variant is the husband with childless wives, whose house remains in phase 3 (Fig. 14). Further variants can be discerned: men who stay monogamous throughout (monogamy being defined as having one wife at a particular time), even if they try to marry as many wives as possible, or men who are polygynous without a coresident parent, but the different compounds fall within the categories and phases mentioned above.

Notwithstanding all variation and the process character of building, the contents of a modal compound can be indicated. This would be a compound with 16 elements (huts, granaries etc.) housing a monogamous family with a recently deceased coresident husband's mother (Fig. 15).

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF COMPOUND PATTERNS

Compounds in the Kapsiki area are left behind because people move away. The reasons for building a new compound can reside in the standard life cycle of the compound as such, i.e. that older sons quit their father's abode to build their own mansion, leaving the field for their younger brothers. This standard diffusion of households has been seriously affected by the historical processes changing social life in the area: the transition from a slave raiding reserve through a colonial backyard to a neocolonial marginal area (Van Beek, in press). The combined factors of increasing safety against the enemy in one's own village territory and even inside the enemy villages, and the gradually increasing population pressure forced people out. So even the old habitations are being deserted (Pl. 4) and gradually fall into disrepair. People take away the construction wood to build their new homes and thereby hasten the deterioration of the old buildings. This, of course, happens only in case of total *déménagement*. In the majority of cases some people stay behind in the old compound. The facility with which the Kapsiki move to a new location in the village is sometimes astonishing. Viewing the compounds one is struck by their air of permanency, of being built to last forever. Still, some minor inconvenience in a house may induce the owner to build a new one:

Mogodé, 17-5-1973:

Deli Mbeleve performs his ceremonies to inaugurate his newly built house. His neighbours and close kinsmen are assembled to start the building of his new *derha* in a communal work party. When the basis for this forecourt is laid, the men gather to drink the beer Deli has brewed for the sacrifice. The offering itself is performed in the strict privacy of the compound, but all men drink the red beer afterwards with great gusto, extolling the virtues of the owner of the new home. However, when I ask where Deli came from, they point at a compound some 40 m away. It was also built by Deli a few years ago, when he moved into this ward. However, that site proved to be somewhat wet, situated as it was in a slight depression. So, in order to have a dry compound during the short wet season, Deli moved lock, stock and barrel.

Old, discarded houses are used by the owner of the location (not necessarily the one who built the house) to sow his sorghum and maize, as old houses contain much manure. However, if the descendants of the inhabitant consider rebuilding the compound, they will ask the field owner not to sow inside.

When interpreting the Kapsiki compound patterns one has to be aware of the social processes involved in shaping the compounds. The discarded compounds usually are the larger ones (phases 4, 5, and 6) as most compounds somewhere in their existence do grow to an optimal size, especially when the occupation of the site has been long. Of course, the losers among the Kapsiki have less progeny, and the chance that their compounds are taken over by their sons is smaller. But the young men of the lineage may take over the compound, not necessarily one's own sons.

So, a simple consideration of the compounds, their size and the number of huts, would lead to a serious distortion of Kapsiki social and demographic reality. Each discarded house is found in its maximal extension, leading towards an overestimation

of population size. The same holds, *a fortiori*, for the marital situation. In our total sample of women's huts 40% were empty. The mobility of the women causes a great number of personal huts to be a *cè kwafawe*, a hut that does not listen, in fact a hut-surplus is needed to compete on a marriage market such as the Kapsiki one.

Kapsiki build in order to grow, adding new huts because they aim at having more people; looking for a wife means building a hut first. They detest empty compounds, where the huts are spaced apart: "too cold, those winds blowing through the courtyard" they complain, voicing a need for physical but mainly psychological shelter. The Kapsiki have always lived in a situation where people were scarce and valuable, and forming an asset to one's status, if and only if they were counted as one's own. Thus, the actual compounds of the Kapsiki are shaped both by the forces of history, demography and ecology and by their perception of their own situation, their own ideology.

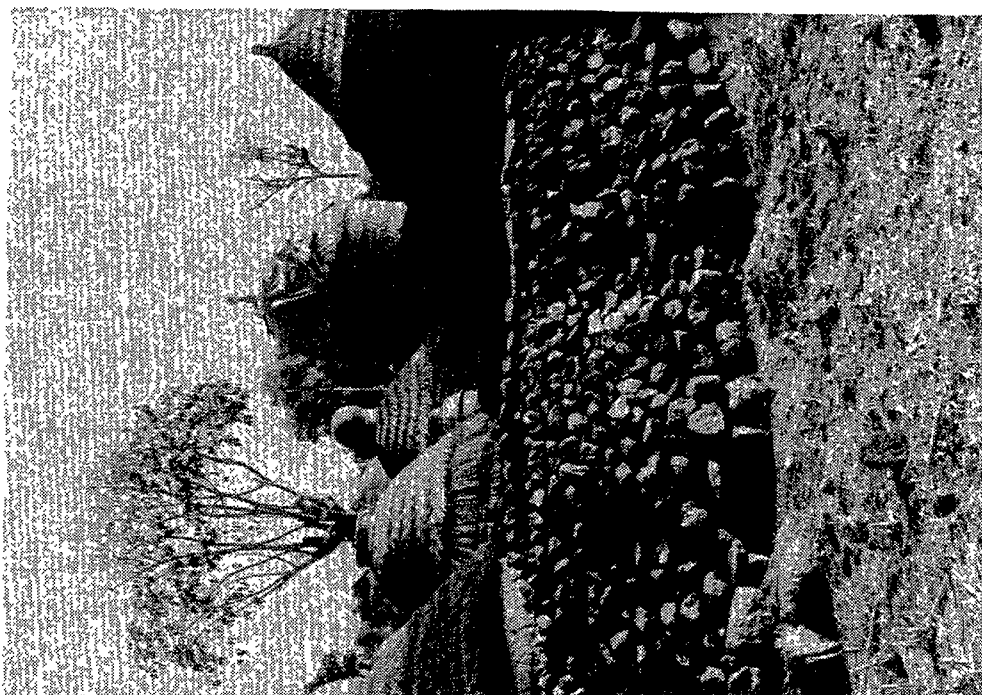
NOTES

1. In the genealogies only the people living in the compounds at the time of the research are mentioned, with the exception of a recently deceased mother, in two instances. So the deceased wives, children or parents as well as the wives that have left the compound are omitted. Drawings are made by F. Stelling for which we are very grateful.

2. Research among the Kapsiki has been carried out in 1971, 1972, 1973, 1979 and 1984, totalling 20 months of fieldstay, thanks to grants of the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO) and the University of Utrecht.

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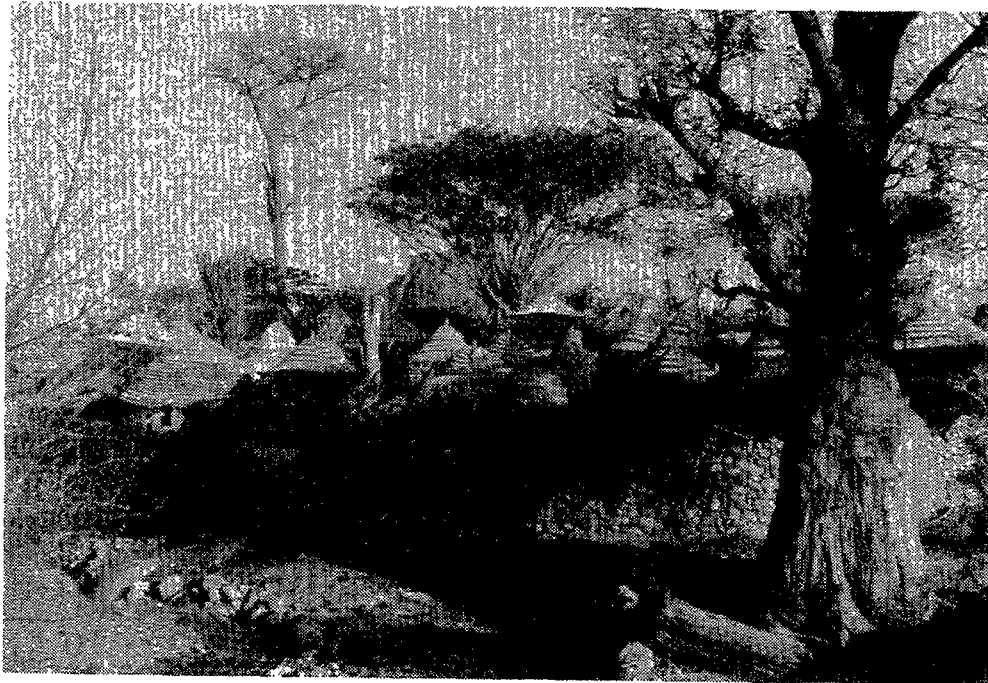
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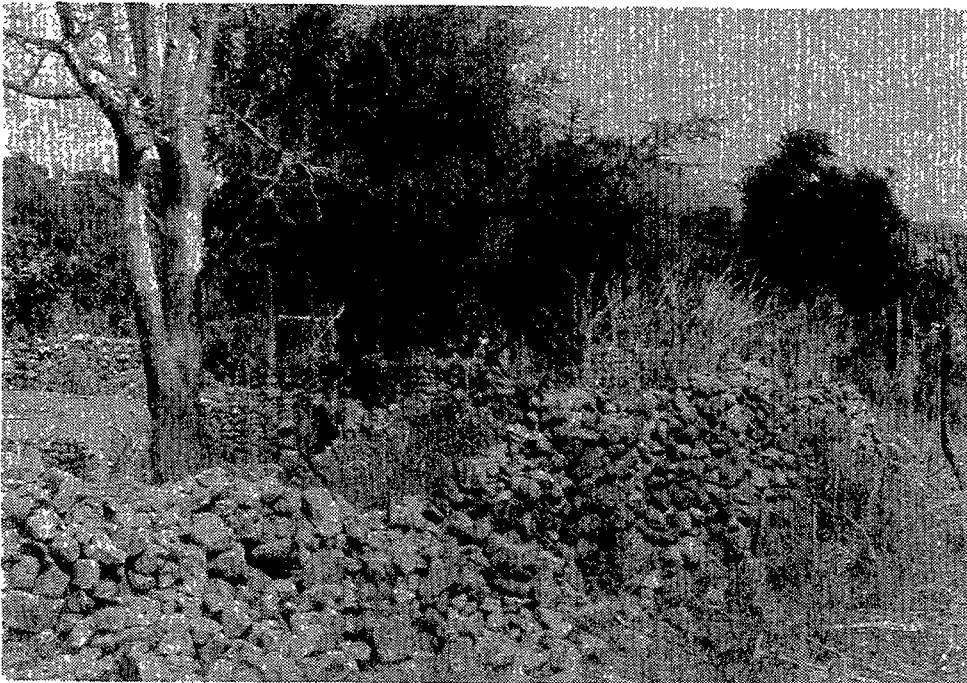
1. Huts behind a wall: the Kapsiki compound, Rhumsu 1973.



2. Inside a Kapsiki compound, Rhumsu 1973.



3. A phase 6 compound full of huts but with few inhabitants, Mogodé 1972.



4. An abandoned compound, Mogodé 1972.